

1946 NORTH TWENTY-THIRD STREET (HOUSE)
(Pearl Bailey House)
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6684-A
PA,51-PHILA,747A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PEARL BAILEY HOUSE (1946 N. Twenty-third Street)

HABS No. PA-6684-A

LOCATION: 1946 N. Twenty-third Street, between Arlington and Berks Streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Pearl Bailey House has cultural significance as the residence of Pearl Mae Bailey (1918–1990), the show business great honored for her work as a jazz artist, stage actress, television and film star, and later a delegate to the United Nations.

DESCRIPTION:

The Pearl Bailey House survives as one-half of a twin of the two-bay, full three-story type on N. Twenty-third and Judson streets in North Philadelphia as described in HABS No. PA-6684.

The house's exterior remains in fair condition. Changes include the addition of a large brick porch with a concrete floor and covered by an aluminum roof. An aluminum storm door covers the front door. The wooden cornice has begun to deteriorate. The condition of the interior is not known.

HISTORY:

For the general North Philadelphia and the N. Twenty-third Street histories, see report for the 1900 block, N. Twenty-third and Judson Streets, HABS No. PA-6684.

PEARL BAILEY

Pearl Mae Bailey was born on March 29, 1918 in Newport News, Virginia, the daughter of a Pentecostal minister who introduced her early in life to song and dance through his energetic services.¹ After a family move to Washington, D.C. in the 1920s, Bailey, her siblings, and her mother relocated to Philadelphia when her parents separated (they were later divorced).² Sometime early in the 1930s Bailey's mother and stepfather purchased the house at 1946 N. Twenty-third Street; she notes that this was the house "where my career started."³ In 1933, Bailey won an amateur singing contest at Philadelphia's Pearl Theatre which led to her first performing job there, though the club closed only two weeks later.⁴ For the rest of the decade, she became increasingly well-known throughout the northeast and by the mid-1940s

¹"Black History: Virginia Profiles, Pearl Bailey," online, 22 Feb. 2001, url: www.gateway-va.com/pages/bhistory/bailey.htm.

²Pearl Bailey, *The Raw Pearl* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968) 6.

³*Ibid.*, 14.

⁴*Ibid.*, 15–16.

was headlining with such big bands as those led by Cootie Williams, Cab Calloway, and Count Basie. Over the next two decades, Bailey held major roles in numerous Broadway shows and films; in 1967 she starred in the all-black Broadway version of "Hello, Dolly," a performance that earned her a Tony Award. In the 1970s and 1980s, she served as a special delegate to the United Nations for the Ford, Reagan, and Bush administrations; in 1985 she completed a degree in theology from Georgetown University and was given the Medal of Freedom by President Reagan in 1988.⁵

SOURCES:

Bailey, Pearl. The Raw Pearl. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968.

"Black History: Virginia Profiles, Pearl Bailey." Online. 22 February 2001. URL: www.gateway-va.com/pages/bhistory/bailey.htm.

HISTORIAN: James A. Jacobs, Summer 2000.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

The documentation of the Pearl Bailey House was undertaken during the summer of 2000 as part of a larger program to record historic landmarks and historically significant structures in North Philadelphia. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), E. Blaine Cliver, Chief of HABS/HAER, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS; funding was made possible through a congressional appropriation for documentation in Southeastern Pennsylvania and supplemented by a William Penn Foundation grant to the Foundation for Architecture for educational purposes. The project was planned and administered by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie and HABS architect Robert R. Arzola. The project historian was James A. Jacobs (George Washington University). Large format photography was undertaken by Joseph Elliott.

⁵"Virginia Profiles."